



SAMPLE SPEECH

Arson remains one of this nation's most dangerous and costly threats for citizens and their property alike. The latest statistics from the National Fire Protection Association reveal more than 400 hundred Americans die, thousands more are seriously injured and an estimated \$1.7 billion dollars in property is destroyed each year in arson fires.

Arson burns without discriminating between the elderly or infants or between businesses, homes, churches or vacant buildings.

Just over a year ago a pair of firefighters entered a burning vacant warehouse in Worcester, Massachusetts to rescue two homeless people reportedly living there. A short time later each radioed they were lost in heavy smoke and were running out of air. Four more fighters rushed in to rescue them. All six died in the next few minutes.

What happened in Worcester stunned this nation and focused attention, once again, on the horrendous hazard of unsecured vacant buildings and fire. The theme of this year's Arson Awareness Week, *It Can Happen Anywhere*, is meant to convey that message; *anywhere an unsecured vacant building exists there is a very real danger another Worcester tragedy could occur.*

We all know vacant buildings are the sites of serious crimes. In rundown neighborhoods, the poor and elderly have had first-hand experience with the depressing effect that dilapidated and abandoned buildings have on their neighborhood and how quickly such buildings become magnets for trash, dope dealers, rodents, the homeless, curious children and fire.

There are thousands of fires in vacant buildings each year in this country. Seventy percent of these fires are officially classified as suspicious or arson. To make matters worse, firefighters are three times more likely to be injured fighting fire in a vacant building as in an ordinary structure fire. We can all agree that vacant, unsecured buildings are an unacceptable risk to people and property in this community.

Targeting vacant buildings for fire and arson prevention is the single most effective thing we can do to control the danger. This boils down to securing the building against illegal entry and clearing combustibles from its perimeter and porches. It can often be that simple. Properly secured, any value the building has is preserved for redevelopment and protected against inevitable damage by vandals, the weather and arsonists.

The first step in the process is to alert your elected officials and your local fire and police department to unsecured vacant buildings in your neighborhood. Report any suspicious activity in and around these structures promptly.

Community leaders must address the most hazardous buildings first. They should require property owners to comply with sensible fire and sanitary codes and use the civil and criminal laws and penalties along with

public and private redevelopment funding to expedite control of blight and ultimately to stop building abandonment.

The price for doing nothing is enormous. More than half a million fires were deliberately set in America last year, and over half of those fires were set by youngsters and juveniles under the age of 18. Vacant buildings played a major role in this epidemic.

Gerard Naylis, President of the International Association of Arson Investigators and Tommy Short, President of the International Association of Special Investigation Units, have said *“The lives and property lost as a result of arson needlessly reduces the quality of life for everyone. The diligence and hard work of both public and private investigators towards the identification and reduction of arson should be recognized and supported by everyone.”*

The most effective way of combating arson is the same method used to control crime - prevention. That takes more than just federal dollars, it takes bodies of committed people. Everyone in the Greater [insert name of city] area needs to get involved in this worthy cause.

If you are living or working near a dangerous vacant building report this problem to your mayor’s office, building and code department and the fire department.

Support the Neighborhood Watch program.

Remember, Arson Stops With You!

For additional information on arson prevention, call the International Association of Arson Investigators, Inc. (314) 739-4224 or the International Association of Special Investigation Units (410) 933 - 3480 or contact the U.S. Fire Administration at (888) 603-3100.

